U.S. Military Clubs in Thailand Probed

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More than 50 Air Force and Army investigators are looking into allegations of a major scandal in the operation of officer and enlisted men's clubs in Thailand.

The allegations are said to center on various kickback schemes involving payoffs for booking particular entertainers.

About 55 persons—including enlisted men, some officers up to the rank of colonel, civilian U.S. government workers and Thai civilians—are under investigation.

Sources say some would-be witnesses were beaten up, apparently to prevent them from testifying.

Four years ago, the Army was rocked by revelation of a scandal in the operation of noncommissioned officer clubs around the world in which the Army's former highest-ranking enlisted man and three other noncoms were convicted of a fraud scheme involving operation of the clubs.

Sources close to the current investigation say the alleged irregularities in Thailand seem to be similar.

Alleged irregularities were initially reported to military authorities at a few specific clubs, but investigators say agents from the Air Force Office of Special Investigations and the Army's Criminal Investigation Division are visiting all 18 Air Force clubs in Thailand and all seven Army establishments.

Sources say there already have been some non-judicial reprimands handed out under the Uniform Code of Militarh Justice, but that they expect that when the military investigators are finished with their work, perhaps by mid-October, that some persons will also be brought to trial.

Sources also say that about half of those under investigation are civilians, including the Thai citizens. The investigation is being coordinated with the Thai government.

The only official announcement of the inquiry was made Aug. 14 in Hawaii at the headquarters of the U.S. Pacific Command.

At that time, the command said allegations of improprieties in the clubs were being investigated through interviews and reviews of club records and that "any documented improprieties will be turned over to concerned commanders for appropriate action . . ."